

# Major Findings #5

## Science-Based Program Components Produce Consistent And Lasting Reductions In Substance Use

The evaluation included 48 programs implemented in communities at high risk. These programs experienced all the challenges of implementing programs in these settings, and they approached these challenges using differing prevention strategies and program management approaches. This diversity was important to the research objectives of the study because it provided an opportunity to learn from the differences among programs. Not all of the programs succeeded, and of those that did achieve their objectives, some were more successful than others.

The evaluation scientifically verified six program characteristics that produced statistically significant improvements in the degree to which programs achieved reductions in the rate of substance use by participants relative to comparison youth in each site.

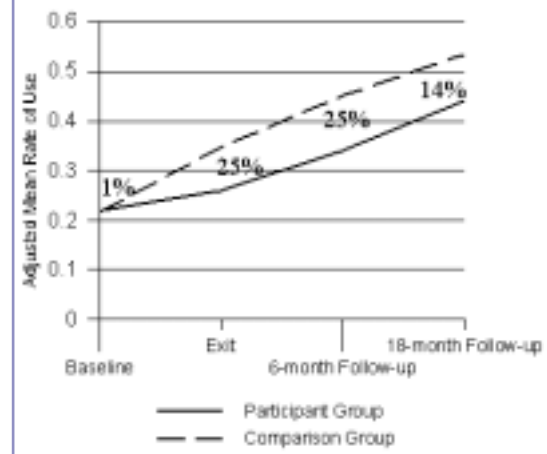
- Prevention programs that emphasized the promotion of attitudinal and behavioral life skills, often identified as protective factors, were more effective in reducing substance use than those emphasizing knowledge only or affective objectives such as self-esteem.
- Prevention programs that emphasized strengthening connectedness to positive peers and adults through team and interpersonal activities were more effective than programs that did not emphasize these delivery methods.
- Prevention programs that selected strategies, implemented activities, and trained staff within a clearly articulated and coherent prevention theory were more effective than those that were designed with less clarity and consistency.
- Prevention programs that emphasized introspective learning approaches that encourage youth to use self-reflection in examining their behaviors and how they impact others or themselves were more effective than those that followed a more prescriptive approach.
- Prevention programs that provided more intense contact (4 hours or more per week) with youth were more effective than those with less intense contact.
- Finally, programs that delivered a very low number of hours (fewer than 20) to their participants did not achieve meaningful effects regardless of other characteristics.

CSAP-funded prevention programs offered after school hours—when youth are most at risk for substance use—were also more effective in reducing substance use for high-risk youth than those delivered exclusively within school hours. The greater effectiveness of after-school programs can be largely explained by their ability to incorporate program features that the study identified as contributing to greater positive effects on substance use across all study sites. The constraints of classroom delivery meant that in-school programs were less able to incorporate these features.

The positive effects of these science-based practices are demonstrated in the substance use rates of youth participating in programs that incorporate all or most of these practices. The figure shows the relative treatment and comparison trends for youth who participated in seven study programs that were characterized by at least five of the practices described above.<sup>3</sup> The programs provide statistically significant prevention benefits that last throughout the 18-month followup period of the study.

Through identifying the design and implementation features that characterize more effective prevention in real community settings, the evaluation has contributed important science-based guidance to strengthening future prevention initiatives and programs.

Trends in 30-Day Substance Use From 7 Representative Sites with Positive Program Characteristics (n = 1,759)



<sup>3</sup> An eighth site with 5 positive characteristics was not included in this analysis because it was an outlier with respect to the magnitude of its positive effects. Including that site would have created a graph unrepresentative of typical program effectiveness.